

THE TOURIST PERCEPTION OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: ROMANIA VERSUS EUROPEAN UNION

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Automatically when we talk about tourism, tourism industry and hospitality industry we refer to the term also increasingly mentioned. Through this work we describe the hotel, restaurant business and other travel related activity services, which since 2008 have been continuously developed and represent a source of benefit to the economy of any country. The paper aims to assess the perception of tourists based on a questionnaire about the quality of hospitality services in Romania compared to European Union countries.

Keywords: hospitality, hotel industry, restoration, perception

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Concept Clarification

Oxford English Dictionary defines hospitality as "receipt and maintenance of guests, visitors and foreigners with generosity and kindness". Hospitality includes all services which provide accommodation and/ or food and beverages to persons who are not resident in the area, regardless of how long they will spend away from it, including a wide range of business such as small guest houses, fast food, pizza house and related services. Public accommodation and catering are different due to service quality, to the people who receive them and due to the targeting customer segments, and they are different by the comfort and quality offered as part of a wider group of activities grouped under the name of tourism.

Hospitality Industry in Romania and the European Union

Hospitality Industry

Systematic analysis of tourism service quality and taking the necessary measures are top priorities in the current period to transform the hospitality industry in a cost-effective resource with high share in GDP, as there are countries with a tourism well developed, such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Switzerland. The creation of a culture of quality in this area, where they have established for decades some inappropriate practices takes time in order to professionally and ethically train all staff and change its mentality.

Tourism professionals say that it should be smiles, courtesy and decency to be part of a quality system. Such a system was launched in Spain, where the number of stars appears with a Q, symbolizing of a system showing the highest degree of service quality Star alleged.

In the Romanian hotel sector, although we can still find obstacles, however, we see significant changes in legal law, in the state economy which shows a financial jam and also the leadership characters involved in tourism that began to change their mentality and understand the need for quality tourism.

The first major trend is the increase in service quality and enhance the facilities offered to tourists, so often met in hotel units integrated into large hotel chains (e.g. Hotel "Mara", Sinaia), in hotels under joint ownership with foreign investors (e.g. hotel SOFITEL-Bucharest) and in other hotels that have passed from public ownership to private ownership (e.g. most of the hotels in Mamaia). The second trend is the realization of investments aimed at building new hotel units. Another trend, but a negative one for Romanian tourism is due to increasing prices charged for hotel services which was not always consistent with the quality of the offered services, which resulted in loss of both foreign and Romanian tourists to other holiday destinations such as Turkey Greece, Croatia, Spain, etc.

Restoration Industry

In collective and commercial consumption the major trade groups increasingly make their presence felt. Comparable levels of collecting revenue for food and trade leads to the assumption of equal relative intensity of expression of horizontal concentration. Moreover, we see the same group both carrying out the activities of collective food and catering business activities (e.g. ACCOR group).

In France, Sodexho Group has 1714 restaurants, serving over 145 million customers annually. From the total number of restaurants, 30% work in education institutions, 43% in enterprises, 27% in health institutions and in asylums.

Across Europe, the rule is held by McDonalds' Corporation. In the context of commercial food, chain fast-food restaurants have the most spectacular results and it's expected that in the future development potential of the fast-food formula will be considerable. Thus, an American spends on fast food restaurants over 10 times more than in a French one and 100 times more than in an Italian one.

Restoration or catering and housing activity are an extremely complex component. Restoration must be distinguished from so-called "commercial" and "collective", which concerns mainly: restaurants, hospitals restoration, restoration of prisons, restoration of the military, school canteens, university restaurants, holiday villages, settlements, social restoration. The first restaurant franchise type McDrive opened in Romania in Braşov in 1998, and the only KFC restaurants opened in Bucharest in 1997. Since 1994 works in Bucharest first Pizza Hut unit, other units operating in Constanta and Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara.²⁴⁴

Research method and interpretation of data related questionnaire

An inquiry based on a survey questionnaire it was conducted on the situation of the hospitality industry covering tourism accommodation services in Romania in comparison with services in EU countries. It was chosen in random a sample of 30 respondents of different ages.

Following analysis of survey data on tourists who have traveled to Romania, highlights the following:

- All respondents have traveled to other cities in Romania than the residence one until that moment and only 27 of 30 respondents traveled in Europe.
- Highest weight is for visiting relatives or friends 38%, sightseeing (24%), recreation and spending a holiday both with a share of 14% and with 5% are business an treatments.
- On average tourists spent more than 10 days (47%).

Following analysis of survey data on tourists, who have traveled to countries in the European Union, highlights the following:

- A 10% have traveled outside the border, and on the other hand a 90% crossed the borders of Romania in a certain period of time.

²⁴⁴Băbăiță Carmen – *Cateringul ca afacere*, Editura Mirton, Timișoara, 2010

- At the question that refers to the highest weight for travel, it is visiting friends or relatives 30%.
 - Tourist attractions in European countries accounted 23% to 24% for sightseeing in Romania.
- This means that Romanians still expect changes in tourism, with further opportunities for Romanian tourism. Spending a holiday in European countries has a 20% share compared with 14% against Romania. Consequently, the Romanians still choose to spend their holiday abroad than at home, for various reasons. Other purposes for travel abroad are conferences, school projects or Work and Travel Program with a rate of 17% and business at a rate of 10%.
- Average foreign tourists spent over 10 days.

Agreement/disagreement with several statements about the services in the hotel units in Romania. Note that at the professional competence the highest score was obtained in Agreement - 8 points, followed by neutral category where the score was 6 points. The difference between the two is rather low, which means that respondents are not fully convinced of the competence of workers in tourism and from the hotel units in our country. Employee courtesy is rated equally between agree and neutral with 10 points each. The tourism industry needs people with knowledge in tourism and which are passionate about working with people in this area. They need to have the desire to satisfy all customers requests with courtesy and kindness.

The agreement/disagreement with several statements about the services of the hotel units in Romania. Note that if professional competence achieved the highest score at the Acord Hotel - 8 points, followed by neutral, category which obtained 6 points. The difference between the two is rather low, which means that respondents are not fully convinced by the competence of workers in tourism and hotel units in our country. Employee courtesy is rated equally between agreement and neutral with 10 points each. The tourism industry needs people with background knowledge in tourism and be passionate about working with people in this area. They also need to have the desire to satisfy all customers with courtesy and kindness.

In respect to the employees' seriousness, respondents gave a score of 9 to neutral and 7 points to disagree. This should give thought to those who have major influence on tourism, which should take into account customer feedback in order to avoid losing them. The high standard of services received the highest score in neutral-10, followed by totally disagree with 9 points. Services clearly need improvements and also need valuable people who have certain essential qualities for those in hospitality, in order to have credibility with customers.

The agreement/disagreement in respect to the hotel units in Europe. Professional competence in Europe received 18 points from respondents, meaning that tourists appreciate the professional competence of workers in European housing units, implicitly the managers who deal with their management. In respect to the courtesy most employees received 20 points, as all respondents agree that foreign employees are very friendly and respect the rules of conduct imposed by the hospitality industry, having a professional conduct. The seriousness of employees was awarded 17 points and 10 points in total agreement. The seriousness of the staff is very important for the guests, who spend a holiday in the tourist accommodation units and who need to feel confidence and reliability from those who attend them. Standard services received a score of 19 points in total agreement and 5 points in the agreement, and only 3 of the respondents gave 3 points to neutral.

Data analysis indicates that respondents had to assess service hotel units in Romania and Europe. Thus, solving the problems arising and professional competence was quoted by the mark 3, although it would be situated in the middle of the chart, compared with hotel services in Europe. Almost the same situation applies to the quality of service and culinary products which have all received a 3, as a mark. In respect to the cleanliness of the room, the mark received was 4, close to maximum, which means that those who take care of cleanliness of the rooms are doing their job thoroughly and seriously. Respondents marked with 3 the technical state of the facilities offered by the rooms and the hotel. Hotel managers should pay more attention to the equipment used in hotel, in order to be able to provide the best conditions to those who cross the threshold

and have the confidence to spend a holiday there. The courtesy of the staff was noted with almost the maximum score, i.e. 4, which is very beneficial for those working in the reception area, in contrast with waiters, who received a kindly 3. Managers of hotel units should have some criterion by which staff is elected, in order to avoid certain future issues.

Advantages of hotel services in Romania, as listed by the interviewed people:

- diverse landscape, attractive and different services;
- some hotels offer low-cost accommodation and food packages, meeting a good quality-price ratio;
- other people consider that Romanian hotels have good managers, that show respect for both their business and visitors;
- good food and special dishes, also trying to provide international menus;

Listed disadvantages:

- complaints are perceived as insults, showing lack of professionalism;
- some hotels charge more than they offer for their services, thus the visitors are dissatisfied;
- some hotels are careless in terms of room and hotel cleanness, there are still issues regarding the staff and their daily duties;

Profile of the interviewed people: 57% women, 43% men. Age: the largest percent is made up of people under 30 years old, then people aged between 30-40, 40-50 and only 3% over 50 years old.

Recommendations: Romanian hotels and their managers should take more advantage of our diverse landscape in order to offer flawless services and attract more visitors, offering a proper quality-price ratio. The hotel staff should be trained accordingly and speak at least one foreign language. Room cleanness should be done in accordance with the star classification. Hotel owners should be more polite and provide more facilities and information regarding their services. Most of the answers refer to the professional behaviour of the staff and their availability, the fact that they should have the necessary education in order to do this job, the cleanness in the rooms. More quality services should be provided, according to European standards, at a fair quality-price ratio, as well as more free time activities.

Conclusion

As a consequence of all the facts presented above, one can strongly claim that the hospitality industry, tourism in general, is an important factor in a country's development, from economic, social and cultural standpoint. Tourism can turn an unknown country into a popular, thriving one. In Romania, the hospitality industry is still developing, especially if we consider the fact that Romania has to comply with the EU regulations.

According to our questionnaire, Romanians think that there are differences between the services provided in Romania and Europe, especially regarding the professional skills, availability and professionalism of the employees. In order to reach European level, we have to pay more attention to the staff, because it is the image of a particular hotel and represents indirectly the quality of the services offered.

A person working in the tourist industry should have communicative skills, be able to interact immediately with people, being trustworthy from the first minutes of the conversation. He/she should be able to solve any problem properly and in a nice manner and at the same time be an expert in the services provided.

The quality of the offered services must also be improved, at an excellent quality-price ratio and, as far as entertainment goes, more free time activities should be developed.

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